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OBESITY COSTS CALIFORNIA \$21.7 BILLION ANNUALLY ***California Businesses Lose Billions in Lost Productivity, Health Care and Workers' Compensation***

SACRAMENTO – California businesses are feeling the financial pinch from employees with obesity-related health conditions, State Public Health Officer Dr. Richard J. Jackson announced today. The combined cost of physical inactivity, obesity and overweight totaled \$21.7 billion in 2000, according to a new report, *The Economic Costs of Physical Inactivity, Obesity and Overweight in California Adults*, the first such research conducted for California.

“These costs are much higher than expected and reveal that the price of the obesity epidemic is far greater for businesses, as well as communities and individuals, than was previously realized,” Jackson said. “These new numbers should convince many more stakeholders to pitch in and help fix the problem so that healthy eating and physical activity become the easy, routine choices for all Californians.”

The costs include direct and indirect medical care (\$10.2 billion), workers' compensation (\$338 million) and lost productivity (\$11.2 billion). The report projects that costs will reach \$28 billion in 2005 if population trends and rising health care costs continue.

The report also tabulates the overall costs of Californians' physical inactivity at \$13.3 billion, obesity at \$6.4 billion and overweight at \$2 billion. About three-quarters of the costs were found to be shouldered by public and private employers in the forms of health insurance and lost work productivity.

“This research utilized California's own surveys and health care statistics to compute the costs associated with physical inactivity, obesity and overweight,” said David Chenoweth, Ph.D., professor of Health Education and Promotion at East Carolina University and a national expert in prospective medicine.

State statistics indicate that more than half of California adults now are overweight or already obese. National statistics show that over the last decade, California has experienced one of the fastest rates of increase in adult obesity of any state. The new report concluded that if present trends continue, the related costs will continue to increase due to population growth, aging, high rates of physical inactivity and obesity and medical inflation.

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"We also estimate that just a 5 percent improvement in physical activity and healthy weight could save California employers billions of dollars each year," Chenoweth added.

The report indicates that if even one or two of every 20 sedentary and/or overweight Californians would become leaner and more physically active, California could realize significant savings of about \$1.3 billion per year, or almost \$6.4 billion in five years.

"The obesity epidemic is more than a public health crisis, it is an economic crisis," said California Health and Human Services Secretary Kim Belshé. "Employers can achieve long-term savings and have a healthy productive workforce by taking simple steps to help their employees make healthy choices, like offering nutritious food onsite and providing access to physical activity."

"Governor Schwarzenegger and his Administration are committed to taking the necessary steps to help Californians lead healthy lives," continued Belshé.

The Economic Costs of Physical Inactivity, Obesity and Overweight in California Adults is available online at www.ca5aday.com. The report was released at a National Public Health Week (April 4-10) event at the State Capitol that included a state employee walk sponsored by the California Department of Health Services (CDHS) to encourage workers to incorporate physical activity into their workday.

For more information on healthy living and physical activity, visit the CDHS *California Nutrition Network for Healthy, Active Families* program's Website at www.ca5aday.com or call 1-888-EAT-FIVE.